

COVID19 Impact Statement

Ryan Giordano

My postdoc at MIT began in Summer 2019, eight months before the COVID19 pandemic broke out in the United States, and the resulting disruptions to childcare for my young son have had a highly detrimental effect on my research output. Throughout the pandemic, my wife's work responsibilities and schedule (remote teaching and service in two departments, alongside ordinary research) have been relatively inflexible compared to the responsibilities of my postdoc. As a consequence, I have taken on the bulk of the extra childcare during the last two years, which severely constrained the time available for research and writing. Additionally, the lack of a quiet, isolated workspace in our home, the impossibility of visiting MIT in person, and the time constraints the pandemic has placed on collaborators have all exacerbated the challenges to my ability to be productive.

Our son, Kai, was 18 months old in March 2020, when we lost our childcare. We did not regain any outside care until August 2020, when our nanny returned to taking care of him part time. Our plan had been to enroll Kai in full-time daycare when he turned two, in August 2020, but many childcare centers had no space, and, prior to the development of the vaccines, it seemed too risky. We were also unable to find a childcare pod to join, in part because of the COVID19 risks associated with seeing my mother in law, who was required for work to interact with a large number of people, and who was, due to her own work demands, unable to provide any help with childcare. We have no other family in the area.

In the 2020–2021 academic year, our nanny continued to provide part time childcare (she was unable to work full time, we were reluctant to introduce new people into our quarantine bubble, and it would have been difficult for us to afford a full time nanny), and I took on the bulk of the rest of the childcare. In August 2021 Kai finally began preschool at the age of three. Though our intention was for him to attend a full day, his complete lack of experience in a childcare setting meant that he was behaviorally unprepared to join the full-day program, and the school requested that we have him participate only in the morning program. In November we tried to add three afternoons a week but were again requested to reduce it to a single afternoon (when there was extra staff) due to behavioral unreadiness. Thanks to increased staffing at the preschool we will be able to have 3 full days and 2 half days of care starting in March 2022, and we expect to be able to reach full time hours by the summer.

There is good reason that the professional difficulties associated with the COVID19 pandemic will not be repeated, even as we have our second (and final) baby due in April 2022. At this stage of the pandemic, it seems likely that any disruptions to childcare can be minimized. Kai is now adapting well to school, and is guaranteed a place next year in the full-day program. We expect to be able to have more childcare for our second baby. Additionally, now that my wife is tenured, we are planning for me to be the one who works relatively more this time around (she will also be on ASMD for the first year of our second baby's life, and is planning to take a sabbatical the year after that). Finally, the ability to see collaborators in person and to have my own workspace will surely have a significant and positive impact on my productivity.